DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 406 718 EA 027 442

AUTHOR	Lashway, Larry
TITLE	The Strategies of a Leader. ERIC Digest, Number 105.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, Oreg.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-EA-96-5
PUB DATE	Apr 96
NOTE	3p.
CONTRACT	RR93002006
AVAILABLE FROM	Editor, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5207 (free; $3 postage and handling waived if stamped, self-addressed envelope enclosed).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- ERIC Publications (071)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Effectiveness; *Administrator Responsibility; *Administrator Role; *Educational Administration; Instructional Leadership; Leadership; *Leadership Qualities; *Leadership Styles
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

A decade ago, principals were asked to become instructional leaders who exercised firm control by setting goals, maintaining discipline, and evaluating results. Today they are encouraged to act as facilitative leaders by building teams, creating networks, and "governing from the center." Rapid shifts in administrative philosophy can be frustrating for practitioners, especially if they are seeking the one best way to lead. These seemingly contradictory approaches, however, can be viewed as complementary strategies rather than as competing paradigms. This digest outlines the tenets of three broad leadership strategies--hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative. It offers the following guidelines for choosing leadership strategies: (1) leaders should use strategies flexibly; (2) leaders should balance short-term and long-term needs; (3) strategic choices must serve institutional values; and (4) the same action can serve more than one strategy. (Contains nine references.) (LMI)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 406 718

ERIC DIGEST

APRIL 1996 NUMBER 105 EDO-EA-96-5

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

The Strategies of a Leader

By Larry Lashway

Geologists tell us that every few hundred thousand years or so the earth's magnetic field flips over; compasses that today point north will some day point south. Something similar happens in school leadership, though the cycles are measured in mere decades.

Ten years ago, principals were asked to become "instructional leaders," exercising firm control by setting goals, maintaining discipline, and evaluating results. Today they are encouraged to be "facilitative leaders" by building teams, creating networks, and "governing from the center."

Lynn Beck and Joseph Murphy (1993) observe that the metaphors of school leadership have changed frequently over the years; no sooner have school leaders assimilated one recommended approach than they are seemingly urged to move in a different direction.

What Strategies Can Leaders Use?

Such rapid shifts in philosophy can be frustrating for practitioners, especially if they are searching for the "one best way" to lead. However, a different perspective emerges when contrasting approaches are viewed as complementary strategies rather than competing paradigms.

As defined here, a *strategy* is a pattern of behavior designed to gain the cooperation of followers in accomplishing organizational goals. Each strategy views the school through a different lens, highlighting certain features and favoring certain actions.

At present, school leaders can choose from at least three broad strategies: hierarchical, transformational, and facilitative. Each has important advantages; each has significant limitations. Together, they offer a versatile set of options.

How Do Leaders Use Hierarchical Strategies?

Historically, schools have been run as bureaucracies, emphasizing authority and accountability. Hierarchical strategies rely on a top-down approach in which leaders use rational analysis to determine the best course of action and then assert their formal authority to carry it out.

Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson (1994) refer to this as "technical leadership," in which the principal acts as planner, resource allocator, coordinator, supervisor, disseminator of information, and analyst.

Hierarchical strategies provide a straightforward, widely accepted way of managing organizations, offering the promise of efficiency, control, and predictable routines. However, Deal and Peterson also point out that hierarchy tends to diminish creativity and commitment, turning the employee-school relationship into a purely economic transaction.

Moreover, the act of teaching doesn't march to administrative drums. Joseph Shedd and Samuel Bacharach (1991) note that teachers' roles are extraordinarily complex, requiring instruction, counseling, and supervision of students who are highly variable in their needs and capacities. Teaching involves great unpredictability, calling for sensitive professional judgment by the person on the scene rather than top-down direction by a distant authority.

How Do Leaders Use Transformational Strategies?

Transformational strategies rely on persuasion, idealism, and intellectual excitement, motivating employees through values, symbols, and shared vision. Principals shape school culture by listening carefully for "the deeper dreams that the school community holds for the future." In the process, they play the roles of historian, poet, healer, and "anthropological detective" (Deal and Peterson).

Kenneth Leithwood (1993) adds that transformational leaders foster the acceptance of group goals; convey high performance expectations; create intellectual excitement; and offer appropriate models through their own behavior.

Transformational strategies have the capacity to motivate and inspire followers, especially when the organization faces major change. They provide a sense of purpose and meaning that can unite people in a common cause.

On the other hand, transformational strategies are difficult, since they require highly developed intellectual skills (Leithwood). Moreover, an exciting, emotionally satisfying workplace does not automatically result in the achievement of organizational goals (Deal and Peterson).

EA 027 442

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CLEARINGHOUSE ON EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT • UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

How Do Leaders Use Facilitative Strategies?

David Conley and Paul Goldman (1994) define *facilitative leadership* as "the behaviors that enhance the collective ability of a school to adapt, solve problems, and improve performance." This is accomplished by actively engaging employees in the decision-making process; the leader's role is not to solve problems personally but to see that problems are solved.

Like transformational leadership, facilitative strategies invite followers to commit effort and psychic energy to the common cause. But whereas transformational leaders sometimes operate in a top-down manner (Joseph Blase and colleagues 1995), facilitative strategies offer teachers a daily partnership in bringing the vision to life. The leader works in the background, not at the center of the stage.

Conley and Goldman say principals act facilitatively when they overcome resource constraints; build teams; provide feedback, coordination, and conflict management; create communication networks; practice collaborative politics; and model the school's vision. Facilitation creates a collaborative, change-oriented environment in which teachers can develop leadership skills by pursuing common goals, producing a democratic workplace that embodies the highest American ideals (Blase and colleagues).

However, facilitative strategies may create ambiguity and discomfort, blurring accountability and forcing employees to adopt new roles and relationships. Facilitation takes time, frustrating administrators who are constantly being pressured to act immediately. It may create great excitement and high expectations, unleashing multiple initiatives that stretch resources, drain energy, and fragment the collective vision (Conley and Goldman).

How Should Leaders Choose Strategies?

Although much of the current literature seems to advocate transformational and facilitative approaches, the limited research evidence does not permit strong conclusions about which strategy is "best" (Edward Miller 1995).

Some researchers urge leaders to use multiple strategies. Deal and Peterson argue that effective principals must be well-organized managers and artistic, passionate leaders. Robert Starratt (1995) says principals must wear two hats—leader and administrator. As leaders, principals nurture the vision that expresses the school's core values; as administrators, they develop the structures and policies that institutionalize the vision.

We know relatively little about how principals make strategic choices, but some basic guidelines can be inferred from the literature.

1. *Leaders should use strategies flexibly.* Thomas Sergiovanni (1994) suggests that organizations, like people, exist at different developmental levels. A school that has traditionally operated with strong top-down decision-making may not be ready to jump into a full-blown facilitative environment.

2. *Leaders should balance short-term and long-term needs.* For example, Miller cites research suggesting that principals who act hierarchically can often implement major changes quickly but that shared decision-making, while time-consuming, is more likely to gain teacher acceptance. Conversely, he notes that teachers sometimes tire of shared decision-making and yearn for a responsive principal who will simply consult them and decide. The leader may have to choose between short-term teacher satisfaction and long-term organizational development.

3. *Strategic choices must serve institutional values.* At times, attractive ideas like empowerment must take a back seat to school goals. One usually democratic principal says, "My responsibility as a principal really is to the children, and if I see areas that are ineffective, I've got to say that we're not effective here and that we have got to change" (Blase and colleagues).

4. *The same action can serve more than one strategy.* Deal and Peterson urge principals to develop "bifocal vision" that imbues routine chores with transformational potential. Bus supervision, for example, serves an obvious hierarchical purpose, but it also presents an opportunity for greeting students, establishing visibility, assessing the social climate, and reinforcing key school values.

In short, running a school does not seem to require all-or-nothing strategic choices. Effective leadership is multidimensional.

Resources

Beck, Lynn G., and Joseph Murphy. *Understanding the Principalship: Metaphorical Themes 1920s-1990s.* New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.

Blase, Joseph; Jo Blase; Gary L. Anderson; and Sherry Dungan. *Democratic Principals in Action: Eight Pioneers.* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 1995. 193 pages. ED 380 890.

Conley, David T., and Paul Goldman. *Facilitative Leadership: How Principals Lead Without Dominating.* OSSC Bulletin Series. Eugene, Oregon: Oregon School Study Council, August 1994. 43 pages. ED 379 728.

Deal, Terrence E., and Kent D. Peterson. *The Leadership Paradox: Balancing Logic and Artistry in Schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994. 133 pages. ED 371 455.

Leithwood, Kenneth. "Contributions of Transformational Leadership to School Restructuring." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Houston, October 29-31, 1993. 58 pages. ED 367 061.

Miller, Edward. "Shared Decision-Making by Itself Doesn't Make for Better Decisions." *The Harvard Education Letter* 11, 6 (November/December 1995): 1-4.

Shedd, Joseph B., and Samuel Bacharach. *Tangled Hierarchies: Teachers as Professionals and the Management of School.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991. 232 pages. ED 354 586.

Sergiovanni, Thomas J. *Building Community in Schools.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994. 219 pages. ED 364 962.

Starratt, Robert J. *Leaders with Vision: The Quest for School Renewal.* Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 1995. 219 pages. ED 354 962.

A Product of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management • College of Education, University of Oregon • Eugene, Oregon 97403

This publication was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract No. OERI RR93002006. The ideas and opinions expressed in this Digest do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI, ED, or the Clearinghouse. This Digest is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced. EA 027 442.